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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000899

SIPDIS

SCA/CEN; EEB
ENERGY FOR EKIMOFF/THOMPSON
COMMERCE FOR HUEPER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [TX](#)
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: U/S BURNS MEETS FM MEREDOV

REF: ASHGABAT 0888

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Under Secretary for Political Affairs Bill Burns and a delegation of senior U.S. officials met with Deputy Chairman and Foreign Minister Meredov on July 11 for a productive discussion of bilateral and regional issues. Meredov welcomed further exploration of a bilateral mechanism that would help structure and regularize high-level engagement, and he offered thoughts (though no new movement) on U.S.-Turkmen cooperation on Afghanistan. Though Meredov made clear Turkmenistan would mind its preference for neutrality in approaches to Iran and Afghanistan, he confirmed his government's intention to continue and potentially to expand cooperation directly with Kabul.

12. (C) (Summary Cont,d) More broadly, Meredov said Turkmenistan was ready to cooperate further with the United States on political issues, energy, security, human rights and humanitarian issues on an equal basis, and the near term establishment of an intergovernmental commission would be a priority. Meredov was clearly energized by his late June 2009 Washington meetings. NSC Senior Director Michael McFaul, A/S for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake, and DASD for East and South Asian Affairs David Sedney participated from the U.S. side, while DFMs Hajiyev and Komekov joined Meredov across the table. END SUMMARY.

NEW CHAPTER IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

13. (C) Meredov began by expressing appreciation for his June 23-25 visit to Washington, noting his meetings were substantive and useful. He expressed strong support for the bilateral agenda that emerged from those meetings. "We welcome the initiative raised in Washington," he said, recommending that it be realized through the formation of a new bilateral, intergovernmental commission tasked with fostering cooperation. Burns proposed that annual consultative meetings be organized in the two capitals, and that the resulting discussions focus on five main baskets of

issues: political matters; bilateral security, to include counternarcotics, counterterrorism and military issues; energy; investment and other economic or trade issues; and the human dimension, to encompass democracy, human rights, humanitarian topics, education and culture.

14. (C) A/S Blake added that the U.S. side would send papers to the Turkmen government with specific suggested topics for consideration. Meredov welcomed our breakdown of issues and added that other topics could be included as well. He suggested that the two parties sign an official joint protocol or exchange papers to formalize the initiative. He noted President Berdimuhammedov's desire to move the process forward quickly.

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S FOREIGN POLICY

14. (C) Senior Director McFaul briefed Meredov on President Obama's recent trip to Moscow and encouraged the group to review President Obama's speech at the New School; the address had made clear, McFaul noted, that U.S. foreign policy would be driven by a clear-eyed assessment of American national interests. We shared a broad array of common interests with Turkmenistan, including stability in Afghanistan and the development of stronger ties between our civil societies. Burns underscored that the U.S. and Russia had achieved important progress; and while Moscow and Washington would not agree on every issue (Georgia, for instance, was an area of sharp disagreement) we would seek to bridge gaps on some matters while making progress on others: a post-START treaty and cooperation in Afghanistan.

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Meredov welcomed the reset in U.S.-Russian relations and said it would widen the space available to Central Asian states to forge broader and more reliable partnerships with the United States.

AFGHANISTAN

15. (C) Meredov said that Turkmen-Afghan cooperation was strong and included significant humanitarian assistance in the form of food, fuel and clothing donations as well as construction of provincial schools and medical centers. Infrastructure development in Afghanistan, Meredov said, was a key area for cooperation. Since 2001, Turkmenistan had built two new electricity lines across the border into Afghanistan and was prepared to construct two more. Meredov mentioned a rail line project that would stretch from southeastern Turkmenistan into northern Afghanistan and facilitate other development. President Berdimuhammedov discussed it with President Karzai during their last meeting.

17. (C) The Foreign Minister opined that the political sphere was the most important in Afghanistan. Some countries operating there simply had negative agendas. Meredov noted President Berdimuhammedov's view that the UN Center for Preventive Diplomacy was the best mechanism for resolving regional issues. While Turkmenistan respected international efforts to gather relevant players together to discuss Afghanistan, Berdimuhammedov viewed the UN Center as a more relevant tool to achieve progress, because it could bring together foreign ministers to discuss the issues and formulate practical approaches. He added that the situation on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border should also be discussed.

18. (C) On the question of negotiating with the Taliban, Meredov noted that one could not be a little bit pregnant,⁸ i.e., all Taliban were bad Taliban. All the same, neutral Turkmenistan would be ready to assist if asked. In the 1990s, Turkmenistan hosted talks organized by the UN that brought together the Northern Alliance and the Taliban, and had also hosted three rounds of peace talks between the warring parties of Tajikistan in the late 1990s, he said.

IRAN

¶9. (C) The Foreign Minister described Turkmenistan's relations with Iran as neighborly, and said that in 18 years of bilateral cooperation, Iran had never interfered in Turkmenistan's internal affairs. He argued that international bodies and the UN should handle issues related to Iran. For its part, Turkmenistan adhered to the international non-proliferation regimes to which it was a party, joined President Bush's non-proliferation security initiative, and denied flight clearance to suspicious overflights.

HUMAN DIMENSION

¶10. (C) Burns noted that the United States was prepared to broaden its education programs in Turkmenistan, and Meredov said he welcomed the offer. Regarding human rights, Burns encouraged the Turkmen side to take further steps to advance human rights, underscoring the importance of being able to show U.S. legislators and interest groups concrete progress, especially as the two countries build on and expand the relationship. Meredov said that all areas of bilateral cooperation would develop on an equal basis, be it energy or human rights. Meredov described democratization as a process as well, marked by step-by-step development. He said the two countries needed to both hear and listen to each other for the process to advance.

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TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

¶11. (C) Assistant Secretary Blake reminded the group, during an interjection, of the importance the United States places on Trafficking in Persons issues. Congressional requirements demanded a pro-active demonstration of progress according to certain metrics; we looked forward to working with Turkmenistan on these issues. Meredov said that Turkmenistan was only beginning to address the issue, in comparison to "certain high-risk countries." He added that Turkmenistan was ready to cooperate on TIP, and asked that U.S. officials provide concrete proposals to help address shortcomings.

12 . (C) U/S Burns cleared this cable.
MILES